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USDA news

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

How We're Focusing More On "Results-Oriented" Performance

No More "Mere Paper Exercises"

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Words like "measurable," "results," "accountable," "outcomes," and "achievement" are getting a lot of attention in government these days, as federal departments—including USDA—have been charged with ensuring that they have "results-oriented performance cultures" in their workplaces.

But haven't we heard this all before—in fact, many times before?

"Yes, we have," acknowledged **Anita Adkins**, USDA's Performance Management Program Manager with the Office of Human Capital Management. "And, in the past, all too often they were basically blown off as mere paper exercises. What's different this time is that there's a much, much stronger emphasis on a 'buy-in' between employees and their first-line supervisors, as they—together—focus not only on that employee's individual performance plan but also on how the supervisor and the employee can each benefit from it."

"This is the culture we want to foster and promote here at the Department."

She pointed out that, in a memorandum dated Jan. 30, 2006, titled "Building a Results-Oriented Performance Culture," that was sent to federal department and agency Chief Human Capital Officers, Office of Personnel Management Director **Linda Springer** advised that "By aligning employee performance plans with organizational goals and holding employees accountable, agencies are well on the way to establishing a results-oriented performance culture. We must now place an even greater emphasis on *achieving* results."

Noting that this emphasis applies to the performance appraisal programs for both Senior Executive Service employees and non-SES employees, the memo spotlighted the use of "Performance Appraisal Assessment Tools" and individual performance test sites, referred to as "beta sites," as techniques which federal departments and agencies could use to strengthen their performance appraisal process. In turn, at USDA OHCM Director **Bobbie Purcell** emphasized this charge during her regular meetings with agency-level personnel directors.

In October 2005 the Food Safety and Inspection Service agreed to serve as a "beta site" at the Department. Then, one year later, as USDA's pilot program expanded, the Farm Service Agency agreed to serve as USDA's second "beta site."

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*"You insert your food thermometer right into your burger like this," advises **Sandy King** (right), "and if it reads 160 degrees, then that burger has reached a safe minimum internal temperature." King and **Archie Magoulas** (left, wearing glasses), both staffers with USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, are working with area elementary school students at USDA's multi-agency Food Safety Education Camp, held in Beltsville, Md., on May 23. USDA has held science fairs and conducted mentoring programs in schools, around the country, for would-be scientists, in the past. But this is thought to be the first time that the Department has held an outdoor camp, in tents, that the students actually leave school to attend. Note **CiCi Williamson's** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY AMANDA EAMICH***

Focus On The Internet Or PDF To Get This Employee Pub

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

USDA is making some changes in how it gets this employee news publication to the Department's employees.

"We're moving away from printing hard copies of the **USDA NEWS**, here at headquarters, and then distributing them to our employees located both here and at our field offices across the country and around the world," explained **Nicol Andrews**, Deputy Director of the Office of Communications. "Instead, we'll be relying more on our Internet and PDF versions of this all-employee publication."

In the past, following the printing of hard copies of the **USDA NEWS** at USDA headquarters, OC has prepared an Internet version of the publication. Then the Office of the Chief Information Officer has sent an e-mail, designed to reach all USDA employees at all USDA offices, advising that the publication is now available on the Internet. **Valarie Burks**, Director of the Washington Communications and Technology Services Division in OCIO, who coordinates that e-mail, said that

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Mike Johanns *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,

If you drive a car today you can be sure of a couple of things: the price of fuel is high and nearly every pump boasts that gasoline now contains 10 percent ethanol.

Today ethanol is the most readily available fuel to help reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Right now it is made mostly from corn. As a consequence some pundits are blaming higher food costs on ethanol. It's true corn prices have been high and demand for ethanol is driving some of the increase. But, that's not the whole story.

Farmers, the folks who in the short term can supply more corn for ethanol, are responding to the demand for corn and they are leading the push to find substitutes for foreign oil. They've planted 19 percent more acreage to corn this year. They have also increased planting of feed crops like barley, sorghum, and hay, which are needed for livestock feed. Once their planting intentions were made known, the corn price moderated somewhat but keen interest in renewable fuels has kept the price strong.

Still, higher priced corn by itself is not responsible for food price increases. We are proposing to ease the demand for corn and higher fuel costs in the long term by supporting cellulosic ethanol. But it's important to understand that higher fuel costs also contribute to the cost of food. When fuel prices go up the farmer's cost of production is directly affected. Also affected are other components of the food chain including processing plants that need fuel to operate and the transportation industry that supplies food to your local grocery stores.

Only a fraction of the price of a raw commodity like corn is returned to farmers.

For every dollar spent on food about 20 cents goes to the farm. The remainder goes to pay for labor, packaging, transportation, energy, advertising, depreciation, rent, interest, repairs, business taxes, and interest.

Our Economic Research Service says that in 2007, consumers will still spend no more than about 10 percent of their disposable income on food, the same as in 2006.

Now does that mean you won't see changes in food prices at the store? No. But they will be slight and they will fluctuate from product to product. In 2006 food prices increased 2.5 percent. In 2007 we expect a food price increase in the same general range of 3 to 4 percent.

As our country brings new types of renewable fuel on line, such as that made from cellulosic materials, pressure on prices for commodities like corn and soybeans is likely to ease. That's why the Administration is proposing to dramatically increase funding to advance the development and production of cellulosic ethanol. Meantime, to the extent current corn prices play a role in the food price index, I believe it is quite literally a small price to pay to help build our energy independence. ■

"Results-Oriented" Performance...continued from pg. 1

"The idea was that those two agencies would creatively brainstorm how to improve their own performance management and appraisal programs—and then implement those modifications, as appropriate," Adkins explained.

FSIS was the first USDA agency to begin its "beta site" undertaking, which is now referred to as a "performance pilot." According to FSIS human resources specialist **Teresa Hunt**, the agency's first step was to fill out OPM's Performance Appraisal Assessment Tool in order to assess FSIS's entire performance management program. "This included," she explained, "such factors as our performance management program's strengths, weaknesses, what works, what doesn't, the degree to which we recognize our employees for their performance, and the degree to which we track mid-year employee progress reviews."

OPM evaluated FSIS's submission and in January 2006 provided written feedback. Hunt said that, based in part on OPM's critique, FSIS made some changes in its performance management program.

For example, it strengthened the performance management training it provided to its employees. "That training focuses on the five stages of the federal performance evaluation process: planning, monitoring, developing, appraising, and rewarding," she noted. "In that 'planning' stage, our training emphasizes an employee's buy-in to his/her performance plan."

Second, FSIS instituted a mandatory critical element for FSIS supervisors on carrying out their performance management responsibilities. "Some of our supervisors may have had that as a critical element already," Hunt said. "But it wasn't a *mandatory* critical element for all our supervisors. And we beefed it up."

Pete Rockx, Director of OHCM's Human Resources Policy Division, added that during 2007 this mandatory requirement is being incorporated into the performance elements of all SES and non-SES managers and supervisors at USDA.

Third, FSIS's non-supervisory employees are now held more accountable for their performance through such factors as quantifiable performance measurements for timeliness, accuracy, and quality of work.

In December 2006 FSIS completed a second Performance Appraisal Assessment Tool for OPM. In February 2007 OPM provided written feedback, advising FSIS that it had nearly doubled its earlier score on OPM's assessment tool.

In October 2006 FSA began serving as USDA's second "beta site." FSA human resources specialist **Stephen Crisp** explained that, as a first step, his agency held a three-day brainstorming session with a representative sample of agency employees, from headquarters and field locations. "The recommendations that this group of employees came up with became the framework for the agency's rebuilt performance management policy," he emphasized.

Next, FSA conducted three "'Net' meeting conference calls" over a 10-day period in spring 2007 with over 350 FSA state executive directors, administrative officers, and district directors in all 50 states plus Puerto Rico.

"The issue was: what do we need to do to improve our agency's performance management program," he recounted. "We relied on a three-pronged approach. First, we related what changes we had in mind. Second, we asked for their feedback. Third, following the incorporation of their feedback, as appropriate, we asked them to inform our field-level employees about what would be coming down the pike, regarding these changes."

Crisp said that his working definition of "effective performance management" is that it maximizes individual employee performance and creates conditions to facilitate that. "So our first big emphasis was to spotlight how important 'effective performance management' is, so that our employees didn't just see these changes as 'another administrative burden'."

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Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

Inspectors from the Food and Drug Administration and USDA spent the early part of May tracking down the origin of tainted pet food ingredients. USDA became involved when some ingredients, discarded for use in pet food, turned up later in both chicken and hog feed. After testing, given the varied diet of those animals, all were deemed safe for human food consumption.

Meantime, Secretary ***Mike Johanns*** *described USDA's 2007 farm bill proposals to expand and improve trade, during a visit to St. Louis. In Chicago he highlighted the array of changes put forward that would benefit specialty crop growers.*

On May 22, Secretary Johanns applauded action by the World Animal Health organization which designated the U.S. as a country at "controlled risk" for BSE. Shortly thereafter Japan announced, after its recent audits of U.S. meat plants, that it has eliminated its 100 percent re-inspection of U.S. beef and beef products and will move to a sampling-based protocol instead. In addition, Malaysia reopened its market to U.S. beef permitting bone-in beef and variety meats from cattle of all ages.

Finally, Secretary Johanns lamented the halt in progress in WTO trade talks in June, brought on by the reticence of India and Brazil to negotiate new market access in any meaningful way.

World Health Organization: The U.S. designation as a country at "controlled risk for BSE" confirms that U.S. regulatory controls are effective and that U.S. fresh beef and beef products from cattle of all ages can be safely traded due to interlocking safeguards. The designation should go a long way toward normalizing beef trade relations with those countries that still have restrictions on U.S. beef imports as a result of the single case of BSE discovered in an imported cow on Dec. 23, 2003. "We will use this international validation to urge our trading partners to reopen export markets to the full spectrum of U.S. cattle and beef products. We are notifying our trading partners of our expectation that they commit to a timeframe to amend import requirements and expand access to their markets to reflect this controlled risk determination," Johanns said.

CRP Re-Enrollment: More than 14,000 agricultural producers and landowners may be eligible to re-enroll land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) continuous sign-up if their contracts expire on Sept. 30, 2007. Those contracts cover more than 300,000 acres. Because continuous sign-up contracts involve some of the nation's most environmentally sensitive land, re-enrollment is considered an important conservation decision.

Avian Flu Lesson Plan: Educators nationwide now have an additional information tool for teaching high school students about avian influenza, specifically highly pathogenic H5N1. A product of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, the lesson explains the many reasons why students should know about this strain of avian flu, which is spreading overseas, and what it would mean if it is detected in the United States. "Understanding Avian Influenza" is available through Agriculture in the Classroom, a grassroots program coordinated by USDA. The lesson plan and the instructor's guide are available at **www.csrees.usda.gov/avianlessonplan.pdf**

Homeownership Month: USDA's Rural Development agency celebrated Homeownership Month in June noting that RD helped 43,000 rural families achieve the American dream of homeownership in the most recent year. The agency also sponsored events that recognized the close relationship with partner organizations through financial and technical assistance by direct and guaranteed loan programs. Volunteers in the Mutual Self-Help housing program were also recognized for helping future homeowners build their own houses under the direction of an experienced construction supervisor. Through community building events, almost 1,500 families built their own homes last year, earning 25 percent credit through "sweat equity."

Tomatoes or squash—or maybe both? That's the question Deputy Secretary ***Chuck Conner*** *(right) is weighing as he examines some of the fresh produce available at the USDA Farmers Market, located adjacent to the Whitten Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. Conner was there to formally open the 12th season of the USDA Farmers Market, which commenced on June 1. According to* ***Errol Bragg****, Associate Deputy Administrator of the Marketing Services Branch in the Agricultural Marketing Service, each Friday through October 26 the USDA Farmers Market is to feature such items as fresh fruits and vegetables, baked goods, maple products, and fresh-cut flowers from local farms in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia.—****Photo by Alice Welch***

Hunger Awareness Day: Participation in the Food Stamp Program, the nation's largest Federal nutrition assistance program, reached 65 percent of all who were eligible in 2005, according to a USDA report released June 5. That compares with just 54 percent participation in 2001. "No one should go hungry in America," Secretary Johanns said. "Through our 15 nutrition assistance programs we reach one in five Americans each year and we recognize on this Hunger Awareness Day that even more can be served. We have increased our nutrition assistance budget by 70 percent since 2001 and we proposed that the 2007 Farm Bill do even more to increase access and participation in USDA programs to help those in need," he said.

—Patricia Klintberg

Employees *make these things happen*

Food Safety

USDA's "Campsite" Schools Students In Food Safety

"The last time my dad cooked chicken at our family barbeque, my uncle brought a food thermometer with him and checked the meat on the grill," revealed **Roland Juarez**, a 4th-grade student from an elementary school in Hyattsville, Md. "My dad was pretty steamed—but I learned it's the best way to know if your chicken is cooked safely."

Roland was one of 60 4th-graders who attended USDA's multi-agency "Food Safety Education Camp" held at a USDA facility in Beltsville, Md., on May 23. Nearly 30 personnel from USDA, the Food and Drug Administration, and the public sector staffed the "Camp"—nine white tents staked on the facility's grassy lawns.

USDA has held science fairs and conducted mentoring programs *in* schools, around the country, for would-be scientists, in the past. But this was thought to be the first time that it has held an outdoor camp, in tents, that students actually leave school to attend.

Food Safety and Inspection Service public affairs specialist **Donna Karlsons**, who conceived of, and then co-chaired the program with FSIS public affairs specialists **Matt Baun** and **Mary Harris**, explained that the camp was "a fun, interactive way to teach students about food safety—while meeting the Prince George's County [Md.] Public Schools science curriculum standards."

"We wanted the camp to accomplish two things," explained **Barbara O'Brien**, Deputy Director of FSIS's Food Safety Education Staff. "First: teach the students about the science behind food safety. Second: Give them knowledge they need to protect themselves, their families, and friends from foodborne illness." The camp was set up so each child received one-on-one interactions with USDA scientists and food safety specialists.

The "Camp" consisted of 10 "stations." Station 1 was set up indoors to allow students to view foodborne bacteria under a compound 1000X-magnification microscope brought to the facility by Agricultural Research Service food technologist **Jitu Patel** and ARS microbiologist **Xiangwu Nou**.

From laptops staffed by USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline staffers such as **Eileen Dykes** in Station 2, student **Jon Bailey** learned from "AskKaren.gov"—USDA's interactive food safety database—not to keep hotdogs in the refrigerator more than two weeks. He said, "I learned from 'Karen' to make sure your hamburgers are cooked to 160 degrees Fahrenheit."

Eileen Medrano learned in Station 3 that "You should wash your hands for 20 seconds, and you can tell how long that is by singing 'Happy Birthday To You' twice."

Students were asked to play junior detective and help determine the food vehicle responsible for a hypothetical foodborne illness outbreak in Station 4 with FSIS surveillance epidemiologist **Kis Robertson**, Food and Nutrition Service senior food safety specialist **Marion Hinners**, and FNS Food Safety Unit Director **Brenda Halbrook**.

"We gave the kids a glimpse into how a foodborne outbreak investigation is carried out," Robertson explained, "while covering key messages in the 'Be Food Safe Campaign.' From what I observed, the children readily grasped all the different food safety concepts presented at the stations. They were able to identify the 'mystery food culprit'."

Station 5 saw students spinning the Food Safety Game wheel and tossing beanbags for food safety prizes with FSIS public affairs specialists **Robyn Sadagursky** and **Joan Lindenberger**.

There was a a hands-on demonstration of how to handle fruits, vegetables, and eggs safely in Station 6, while ARS microbiologist **Cheryl Mudd** conducted a food thermometer calibrating exercise in Station 7 by having students hold a variety of instruments in ice water. Public Health Service Commanders **Janice Adams-King** and **Michelle Poindexter** used Station 8 to show students how to pack bag lunches safely.

In the "Danger Zone" station, staffed by FSIS food safety specialists **Maribel Machin-Alonso** and **Gertie Hurley**, students counted dry lentils into Petri dishes to represent the increasing number of bacteria as they double in number every 20 minutes when the food is left out at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit. "After I went to Station 9," confided student **Lucio Rivera**, "I lost my appetite from learning about how fast bacteria grow. But when I got to Station 10, where they were grilling hamburgers, the smell made me hungry again."

The last—and most aromatic—station saw FSIS home economist **Sandy King** demonstrating messages for summer food safety, such as 'Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill.' Nearby, FSIS food technologist **Archie Magoulas** held court at the grill, demonstrating how to use a food thermometer when cooking hamburgers, hotdogs, and chicken.

Then it was off to lunch and a photo opportunity with USDA characters **BAC!** and **Thermy**. But first, "If your mom tells you to wash your hands before you eat, do it," reminded student **Cindy Escobar Lopez**. "At Food Safety Camp we learned she knows what she's talking about. Moms are sometimes right."

—CiCi Williamson

*"Now count out 64 dried lentils and place them into a Petri dish. See how many more you have than the 8 we started with an hour ago," notes FSIS's **Maribel Machin-Alonso** (right). She and FSIS's **Gertie Hurley** (second from right) are explaining how fast bacteria can multiply when foods are left in the "Danger Zone"—which is at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit.—**Photo by CiCi Williamson***

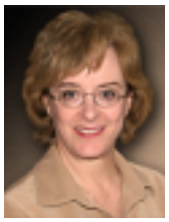
Natural Resources And Environment

NRCS Helps Make This Idaho "Bladder Dam" A Reality

"A repair technician almost lost his life trying to repair some planks on the old dam. The strong water pressure took him under. Luckily, someone then cut his safety line that he had attached to the old structure, allowing him to float to shore."

Russ Manwaring was referring to the problems—and the urgency—associated with dam failures. Manwaring, the West Central Highlands Resource Conservation & Development Coordinator for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, based in the USDA Service Center in Emmett, Idaho,

Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Katherine "Kitty" Smith is the Administrator of the Economic Research Service.

From December 2006 until her selection for this position Smith served as Acting Administrator for ERS. She was the agency's Associate Administrator from 2005-2006 and, earlier, from 1991-93.

Smith served as the Director of the Resource Economics Division in ERS from 1999-2005 after having been the Director of its Market and Trade Economics Division from 1996-98. From 1993-96 she was the Policy Studies Program Director for the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture in Greenbelt, Md. She served as a Senior Fellow with the National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy at Resources for the Future, Inc., in Washington, DC, from 1989-91. She began her career with ERS as a research economist in 1977.

Previous ERS Administrator **Susan Offutt** is now the Chief Economist at the Government Accountability Office. ■

Dan Upchurch is the Director of the Agricultural Research Service's Southern Plains Area, based in College Station, Texas.

From 1998 until his selection for this position Upchurch served as Director of ARS's Cropping Systems Research Laboratory in Lubbock, Texas. He also served as research leader of the Wind Erosion and Water Conservation Unit at the Lab from 1996-2006. In addition, from 1983-2006 he engaged in his own research at the Lab, focusing on environmentally induced stress on plants and water conservation.

Upchurch began his full-time career with ARS as a soil scientist at ARS's Grassland, Soil and Water Research Laboratory in Temple, Texas in 1980, concentrating on understanding root system development and water uptake by plants.

Chuck Onstad, the previous Director of ARS's Southern Plains Area, retired from that position following 40 years of federal service, and all of it with ARS. ■

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knows firsthand about dam failures.

He helped to plan a unique replacement to one of Idaho's aging dams—the wooden diversion dam on the Lower Payette River in southwestern Idaho—with an "automated inflatable rubber diversion dam"—otherwise known as a "bladder dam."

Years before the near-death experience of that technician, Manwaring and officials from the private sector Lower Payette Ditch Company and others were brainstorming alternatives to replace that aging dam. They came up with the idea of using an inflatable bladder dam that would conserve water, provide efficient water delivery, and offer operator safety, low maintenance, reliability, and adequate fish and recreational boater passage, while improving water quality.

Terril Stevenson, an NRCS natural resources specialist based at the agency's state office in Boise, Idaho, explained the concept behind a bladder dam. The rubber bladder—which remains underwater—is anchored to the underwater foundation of the dam and is inflated by a low air pressure system that is fully computer automated. "Think of it as an air mattress," she said. "The bladder lies deflated on the river bottom until it is inflated by a low pressure system of air blowers." The air inflates the dam to its maximum height of three feet. Once this diversion dam is deployed, water is pushed back against the barrier and is forced into the irrigation canals.

Manwaring explained that for 85 years a wooden diversion dam had diverted water from the Lower Payette River into the irrigation canals used by more than 500 farmers to irrigate over 13,600 acres of farmland. "But the deteriorating dam's concrete floor eventually cracked," he said. "That allowed water to undermine the dam's foundation."

This, in turn, caused problems for the workers who waded out into the river to manually add or remove the dam's planks that were used to raise or lower the water levels. "Ultimately," Manwaring pointed out, "these setbacks disrupted the water's flow for those farmers who were dependent upon the water from those irrigation canals."

In March 2004 Idaho NRCS received $624,000 through the Idaho RC&D program to help replace the old dam structure. But, Stevenson noted, before any restoration work could be done using federal funds, NRCS technicians had to conduct an environmental assessment per the provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act. The completed environmental assessment described the need for the project, the proposed action, alternatives to the proposed action, and environmental impacts of the proposal and alternatives.

"After reviewing the findings from our environmental assessment," Stevenson said, "we determined the bladder dam surpassed all the other alternatives in relation to water quality, plants, animals, and human safety."

Construction on the bladder dam began in September 2006 and the $2.3 million project was completed in November 2006. Manwaring noted that there are a few other bladder dams in Idaho, but they're all about 100 feet long. "By contrast," he said, "this particular bladder dam on the Lower Payette River is over 300 feet long, unique for Idaho."

"Water is flowing just fine right now into the irrigation canals, with the bladder dam only partially deployed," observes NRCS's ***Russ Manwaring****, at the site of the bladder dam on Idaho's Lower Payette River. "However, the dam will continually adjust to full deployment to provide water flow into those canals, as the river's water level drops."—***Photo by Louise Manwaring**

"The concept of a bladder dam has been around for awhile, but they're not that common, and they can be complex from a design standpoint," added **Dave Thackeray**, NRCS's national civil engineer in Washington, DC. "I'd guess that NRCS does no more than one to two bladder dams a year around the U.S."

Stevenson said that the automated bladder dam does not require manual adjustments because the computer automatically adjusts the height of the dam depending on the river flow and irrigation water demand.

Boise-based NRCS state wildlife biologist **Frank Fink** said that there is now better fish passage through the Lower Payette River—an incentive for boaters and anglers.

"And the diversion efficiency of the new dam is now allowing more water to remain in the river channel, thus improving water quality," said Manwaring.

—Dastina Johnson

So, just how do you safely ship an 86" by 86" cotton quilt over 1,300 miles, and how do you make sure that, when it arrives at its destination, its arrival is going to be expected—and that it's going to be treated with the appropriate amount of TLC?

Those were the challenges facing **Cathy Luckey**, an Agricultural Research Service administrative support technician at Houston's Children's Nutrition Research Center, a facility which houses employees from ARS and the Baylor College of Medicine (BCM).

The quilt had been voluntarily crafted by employees from the Children's Nutrition Research Center under the guidance of the four members of the "Women of Color Quilters" at that facility. One of those four—**Cynthia Boutte**, a BCM research coordinator—explained that this "Heart of Peace" quilt consists of a white dove, in the center, carrying an olive branch with a heart. The dove is framed by 40 quilted blocks, each 6" by 6". 31 employees crafted the individual blocks, and they are designed to represent their family members who have served—and/or who are currently serving—in the military, OR a research project at the facility, OR a particular department at the facility. "The quilt is dedicated to men and women of all races serving our country," Boutte explained.

This wasn't the first quilt which employees at that facility had crafted on their own time. But this was the first one in which officials at the facility suggested that it be taken "on the road"—specifically, to be showcased at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, as an EEO display.

"There is a lot of racial, ethnic group, and gender cultural heritage represented in many of the quilted blocks," Luckey noted.

Accordingly, when **Perry Rainosek**, the ARS Administrative Officer at the facility, asked Luckey to coordinate that effort, her initial tasks were to: figure out the logistics of such a shipment, determine the paperwork requirements, and develop contact personnel at the receiving end to ensure the quilt's safe arrival and protection.

In January 2007 Luckey wrote a letter to the Office of Operations, explaining her intentions. "I ultimately received a response that my request was approved," she recounted. "But I was advised that I needed to identify a contact person who would be willing to serve as a 'responsible party' to receive the quilt once it arrived at its destination." She also was sent an application for the 'space permit' that is required in order to display an item in any USDA headquarters

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PROFILE PLUS *More About: Sheryl Maddux*

Sheryl Maddux, Director of USDA's Homeland Security Office, came to Washington D.C., grudgingly, in 2001. She'd served 21 years in the Forest Service scaling every rung of the job ladder from the district up to the regional level. As a District Ranger she wanted to keep working in a forest but she had to come to Washington to get one more notch in her belt to achieve her ultimate goal: Director of Fire and Aviation Management for the Forest Service's Southern Region, based in Atlanta.

By September 11, 2001, she had served just two months in Washington D.C. as Branch Chief of Emergency Operations and International Fire. After the attack on 9-11, she went to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as the Emergency Support Function 4 Coordinator for Forest Service employees who were on the ground in New York and at the Pentagon. In New York, the scope of the tragedy in human and physical terms hampered organization initially. Folks were stunned by the magnitude of the task before them.

"Our employees were there to provide logistical support—everything from supplies to portable showers. But after talking with the Fire Department of New York [FDNY] we formed an operations and planning group, the same sort of organization we'd use if we were managing a wildland fire," Maddux said. Within days the FS team working with the city government had mapped Ground Zero by division, assigning each division the resources it needed to accomplish the daily objectives. They also created a data base to account for everything that was found—from wrist watches to plane parts.

"We also helped them establish clear radio communications. Skyscrapers presented the same sort of barrier we encounter when mountains block radio signals. So we put a portable repeater on the Empire State Building and a ship out in the harbor and pretty soon every one was communicating," she said. [Then] Mayor **Rudy Giuliani** was kept informed through a daily incident action plan that had been signed off on by numerous agencies with jurisdictional responsibilities at Ground Zero.

For Maddux the most gratifying outcome of the work with the FDNY she calls a real success story for USDA. The FDNY firefighters who were trained by the Forest Service in how to set up and manage an Incident Command System volunteered to help after Hurricane Katrina. "We actually helped train a group of folks who took that expertise and used it in a completely different but urgent situation," she said.

9-11 also changed Maddux's career path. As early as age 14 Maddux knew she wanted to work in forestry and fire, following her father's career path. He was Battalion Chief on the Fire Department in her hometown of Mattoon, IL.

But in the fall of 2002, she was asked to set up a Homeland Security Office within USDA and coordinate with the White House and all USDA agencies with homeland security responsibilities, such as FSIS, FNS, and FSA. "It was exciting. Nothing was defined. And I found that working relationships I had previously established with people at the Department of Defense, State, FEMA, and the Corps of Engineers were invaluable," she said.

Today her office ensures agencies follow the USDA emergency preparedness implementation plans, conducts vulnerability assessments and sector specific plans to protect the nation's farm and food infrastructure, and keeps track of the Secretary's whereabouts. "If an event occurs and the Department of Homeland Security considers raising the threat level, we must determine how that will impact USDA and confer with the Secretary and Subcabinet on how to inform our employees and those we work with."

Last Book Read: *"The Book of Honor: The Secret Lives and Deaths of CIA Operatives"* by **Ted Gup.**

Last Movie Seen: *"Spiderman 3."*

Hobbies: Visiting my husband, **Vernon**, who is the National Environmental Protection Act coordinator for the Forest Service on the Cherokee National Forest in Unicoi, Tenn.; watching and attending NASCAR; reading; and travel.

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: Crab and Eggs Benedict at "Food Matters" in Alexandria, Va.

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "Continue implementing the Homeland Security's Presidential Directives 7—'Critical Infrastructure'—and 9—'Defense of United States Agriculture and Food'—build our Intelligence Program, and continue Emergency Preparedness Training."

—Patricia Klintberg

building in Washington, DC.

Luckey initiated a number of inquiries—by phone and e-mail—seeking a 'responsible party' for the arrival of the quilt. **Joyce Cooper**, an ARS space management assistant in Washington, DC, agreed to serve in that position. However, she was out of town when the 'quilt shipment' arrived at USDA headquarters on May 23. So Cooper asked **Stephanie Basham**, a space management specialist with the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, to serve as the 'responsible party' instead, and Basham did.

Luckey also had to acquire two odd-sized cardboard shipping boxes. The first box would contain the metal frame on which the quilt would hang when displayed. The second box would contain the quilt itself, plus three laminated posters explaining the background behind the quilt, plus brochures describing the quilt.

In addition, **Jackie Wiggins**, a facilities technical specialist with the Washington Area Service Center in the Office of Operations, provided wooden easels for the three laminated posters, plus a rope barrier to protect the entire display.

"By the time we flew into Washington and then made it to the Patio of the Department's Whitten Building—on Memorial Day—the boxes were there waiting for us," Luckey affirmed. "So we set it all up right away, during the holiday." The "Heart of Peace" quilt exhibit remained on display at that site for a week.

Accompanying Luckey and Boutte, to assist in the "Heart of Peace" quilt exhibit, was **Ana Rubio**, an ARS office automation clerk at the Children's Nutrition Research Center. She had crafted block number 19 on the quilt, which depicts the USDA logo in green, below which rests ARS's scripted logo. They are surrounded by a field of stars within a light blue sky.

In addition, **Debbe Thompson**, an ARS nutritionist at the facility, had crafted the second of the two quilt blocks provided by ARS personnel. Her block, number 31 on the quilt, is a multi-colored design which spotlights specific studies that she has headed. The two logos in her block, reflecting those studies, include "Food, Fun, & Fitness Internet Program for Girls" and "Fitness Zone."

"Quilting is a hobby that can also inspire patriotism," observed Luckey. And she made sure that the "Heart of Peace" quilt made a successful trek to Washington, DC, in order that more USDA employees could observe one byproduct of that effort. ■

—Ron Hall

"This piece of lettuce on the 'Sick' side of the board is the culprit which caused foodborne illness in our exercise, because it was mishandled during food preparation," notes FSIS's ***Kis Robertson*** *(center)—who is sporting the words "Certified Food Detective" on the badge on her lapel. Note* ***CiCi Williamson's*** *story on page 4.—**Photo by Amanda Eamich***

"Results-Oriented" Performance...continued from pg. 2

Second, he said that FSA is spending more time aligning individual performance plans to agency goals, and, in the process, is stressing results-oriented performance based on specific, credible, measurable, and balanced performance elements.

Third, FSA returned to its earlier use of a multi-tiered performance appraisal system, based on five possible levels of performance: Outstanding, Superior, Fully Successful, Marginal, and Unacceptable. "In 2000 we had switched over to a Pass-Fail system—and, in my opinion, it was a disaster," he laughed. "So in 2005 we switched back to the system we had used before."

Fourth, Crisp said that FSA's strengthened performance management system is putting more emphasis not only on meaningful recognition of quality performance but also on how to deal with poor performance.

"We're serving as a 'beta site' for USDA for fiscal year 2007," he noted. "So our revisions are still evolving. But we plan to complete our pilot program in September, and then begin to assess its effectiveness."

"Beginning in October," Adkins noted, "USDA's remaining program agencies and staff offices are to participate in strategies designed to evaluate and improve their respective performance management and appraisal programs. Agency-level performance management program managers will be the coordinators for this initiative within their respective agencies."

"The goal in all of this is to focus on a results-oriented performance culture here in USDA." ■

This Employee Pub...continued from pg. 1

the all-employee e-mail includes a link to the website to conveniently access the publication. With these changes, that 'heads-up' e-mail message will now become even more important.

"And now that e-mail message will also include a link to a PDF version—in color—of the **USDA NEWS**," she noted.

Andrews said that employees at any USDA office may use the PDF version of the **USDA NEWS** to print out their own copies as they wish—and, if they have a color printer, they'll be able to print out a hard copy in color. "Or, employees may wish to just read that PDF color version on their computer screen, or else view the Internet version of the publication," she said.

USDA has prepared a newsletter for all its employees for over 66 years. It has also prepared an Internet version of the **USDA NEWS** since January 1996, and, since that time, previous 'Internet issues' of the employee news publication, dating back to 1996, have been archived at USDA's website at **www.usda.gov**

These changes will begin with the next issue of the **USDA NEWS**. ■

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*"There had better not be any lint on my particular quilt block," quips ARS's **Ana Rubio** (right), with the Children's Nutrition Research Center in Houston. She and Center colleagues **Cathy Luckey** (left) and **Cynthia Boutte** were involved in the crafting and/or shipping of this "Heart of Peace" quilt from Houston to USDA headquarters in Washington, DC—where the quilt was on display at that site for the week following Memorial Day. So, what's it like to ship an 86" by 86" quilt over 1,300 miles, and make sure it's well taken care of when it arrives at its destination? Note the story on Page 6.—* ***Photo by Alice Welch***

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Yaqueline Leiva

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Hair: **Brown** Eyes: **Brown**
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